**Transcript for Arrun**

**Keren Coney:** Thank you, so what I’m going to do now is pass on to Arrun.. and so Arrun has got quite different story, which involves teaching in Japan and also now studying for a PhD what I’m going to do is pass over to Arrun to tell his story if that's all right.

**Arrun Thuraisingham:** Oh yeah that's great Thank you Keren and I may touch on things that Michael said as well, but this should be interesting so, Hello everyone, my name is Aaron Thuraisingham and I was actually diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, when I was very young and had quite a bit of support going through school. But, I left sixth form with one a level and was not in a good place mentally and emotionally I was resigned to not really doing anything. I was very depressed didn't feel like I could cope in the world, work and had very little sense of direction in life.

Since leaving school I’ve worked Saturdays as a stable hand i've gone back into education done an access course to get into university complete a bachelor's in history than a master's degree in medieval history. I trained to teach English as a foreign language I volunteered at a local museum. I taught English while living in Japan and as Keren said I’m currently studying for my PhD as a part of a collaborative project between University of East Anglia, and the British Museum, and I can say over that time almost everything about how I perceive myself and how I looked at the world of work, and what I wanted in what we might call a career has changed a lot. After talking with Keren we figured it might be most helpful if I talked about how over the years I’ve managed to develop an approach to work that's really gone hand in hand with a positive proactive approach to my mental health.

I guess, if you want to take one thing from what i'm about to say is that, taking care of your head and managing your move into work at a pace, you are comfortable with is just as important as how much you're getting paid or maybe if you're working at all. Going from miserable at school to enjoying ramen for my lunch break in Kawasaki took very gradual steps and career without career development without mental health development isn't so great, sometimes.

When I was doing my first degree, I was actually living at home because I didn't feel ready to live independently and I wasn't sure I could balance the pressures of uni work with taking care of myself. But, as I was finishing up my degree still with no real idea what I wanted to do, I took history, because I was interested, my dad wanted me to do law. I had a conversation with a couple of my lecturers and basically, they said you're quite good at this, you should do more of it but somewhere else to spread your wings, and I would say in general it's good for growth to travel a bit move away from places that are familiar and expose yourself to meeting new people. Otherwise, it's kind of quite easy to fall into a kind of tepid lethargy where you're not really doing anything.

I should also say from turning 18 to my final years as an undergrad I was seeing a counsellor who I would routinely be fretting to and saying oh my God this assignment is too hard, or i'm worried i'm not making friends or whatever, which was good, because it basically acted as control well and a comfortable place where I could work through fears that came with new things without having to talk to family about that.

So, I ended up doing a master's degree in medieval history at St Andrews in Scotland, which was the first time I was living in my own place, cooking for myself and that sort of thing it's where I learned to budget for food and washing and also, I learned to socialize a bit more, naturally and make friends, because I was not so distracted with history work I knew I could do history, so the living alone that was the big challenge.

At St Andrews, I had a really good time helped me to grow as a person didn't even see my counsellor anymore made some really good friends, but when I graduated there wasn't a job for me at the end of it.

However, The year I graduated I basically went home to can on sat on my own thinking about what I could do next, because I wanted to be an academic. But, and this is something we can maybe talk about more later. Being a history lecturer is quite a competitive field, a lot of people do PhDs it's very expensive and your job prospects, at the end of it are not superb. I was not able to get into a PhD project immediately after graduating and that really bummed me out. But what I started to realize through conversations with my friends and my family and my counsellor was that, even if I couldn't do a PhD, there were things I had done at university, which I enjoyed and knew I could do elsewhere and spending time at uni I realized I enjoy teaching.

I realised I would like to live outside of England, I knew how to study languages, I liked doing research and I wanted to spend my time doing something that I felt was constructed I didn't want to just sit on my ass and get depressed together, and that was a time when I really started thinking about other jobs, I tried applying to the civil service, fast stream and got turned down, and then through talking with other people, I came to the idea of teaching English and I basically looked at it as well, it's not exactly what I want to do, but there are parts of it, I would enjoy i'm interested in Japanese history and culture, I like teaching I like the thought of having my own money sorry to be crass about that, but uh maybe, so I thought, maybe teaching is a thing I could do, and I did not just run off to the first company that would hire me because you do not need a temple.

Teaching foreign language qualification to teach English many countries will take you as long as you have a degree. But I wanted to take the temple course because it would widen my array of choices and get me familiar with teaching in a way that meant I wouldn't just get thrown in at the deep end on my first day at work, doing the temple qualification also gave me the opportunity to learn from more experienced teachers and appreciate some of the potential pitfalls of working in the sector and let me move in a different kind of circle, because you know when I was a uni almost everyone was sort of a 20 something or a lecturer the kind of people doing temple had very often done other jobs and had other experiences that they could draw on, and I can ask questions about.

After finishing temple training ended up working for a company called Nova, which is a Japanese conversational English school and they teach anyone from ages like three to 103, and this was my first full time paid job. The interview process was fairly simple they advertise they were the teachers on temple.org website and I sent an email to them saying, to whom it may concern my name is Aaron Thuraisingham, I have seen your advertisement teachers, I have attached a copy of my CV, please let me know if you feel I would be suitable. They got back to me, there was an online interview, where I was asked some basic questions about managing a classroom and a other things and I got the job so.

That was the winter of 2019 and I got the offer and the offer and heading out to Japan, at the end of February 2020. Working at Nova it's a company with a bit of a reputation, but I actually had a really good time I was working five days a week, typically nine to five though one day a week, I was working from noon until 10. I was teaching eight classes, a day, and these classes were generally adults minimum of one up to five or eight kids and Nova I honestly feel like in some ways, be an ideal job someone on the autism spectrum because it's engaging it pays competitively and it's very structured, Japanese society, I found is very orderly.

I did not plan my own lessons, even though with the temple training you know how. I would do their lesson plans, which is very which are very rigid, but the students like it, and they will be pretty consistently one or two lessons a day which would be free conversation with a student who just wanted to talk. I actually really enjoyed that Nova also arranged my accommodation, they helped me with my visa they helped me to find a doctor, so I can stay on medication. Something I think is useful to know is that when you're working for a company like this, yes, you should be professional and apply yourself but, they do also try to help you the teachers are all managed by someone who is a native English speaker and they are the people who have been with the company, a long time and they know the answers to any practical questions you have, and they expect you to ask those questions so don't feel that your command of the subject has to be perfect and you've just arrived at work on your first day and know everything nobody expects that to happen, certainly not when you've just finished university.

One thing I will say about working perhaps outside of Europe. Is that the company may not have special provisions in place for people with autism. As part of my immigration process, I had to write down any disabilities or illnesses, I had and I wrote down depression, anxiety, Asperger syndrome, so the company knew. But, specifically in Japan, and I suspect other parts of Asia, the level of understanding and accommodation of people on the autism spectrum will not be where it is in the UK. So this is also why it's a good idea to develop your own strategies for managing little mental health and behavioural ticks you might have.

Japanese business culture is also infamously particular about personal appearance, so I did not have the long hair and the moustache when I was working in Japan men have to be clean shaven. Women have to keep a natural hair colour no piercings or tattoos, suit and tie every day, etc, which was, I was fine with, but if you don't like shaving or having need. Your mileage may vary and still working for Nova public a huge accomplishment to me, really combined with doing my masters that you feel like I could work anywhere and do any job in a way, I just didn't feel until I actually started working and realized it's a lot less scary than you think it is.

It was a job that became very familiar and will often get repetitive, as I got familiar with the lessons. But every so often I would be asked to cover another school or teach a special type of lesson and that was a bit scary, but also added some variety and they would make sure I knew how to get ready to go and then I knew what to do with each lesson. Had I not finished my contract, a colleague, informed me that because I had temple training, I would have been able to apply for a job in a Japanese school if I wanted to stay in Japan, or, I could have picked another country like China or Russia or I was actually living in Canada and gone to work somewhere else, and just enjoy being in another country.

What actually happened was a friend from St Andrews sent me a link, for her PhD project, not the project i'm doing now, a different project, but connected to this, which is the one that interested me and I wasn't able to find more information on this project that i'm doing now, so I basically said, thanks to the friend and didn't think any more about it. Then another friend saw the project, I was interested in and she forwarded it to a third friend, asking him to forward it to me, bearing in mind, I hadn't spoken to this woman for getting on eight months. But now I had basically three people suggesting I do this project, and I was still reluctant to that because I didn't think I good odds of being accepted.

Going back to my previous points about PhD positions being a competitive thing I had put my name forward for another PhD project back in 2019 which was not funded, but was much closer to my area of expertise, and I remember thinking as I wrote my application in 2019 that you know this is tailor made for me, i've just written 15,000 words on this exact subject if i'm not getting a PhD on the back of this i'm probably not going to be accepted at all and they didn't exactly, and they said we want someone with better grades, so I half heartedly submitted an application for the project, my friend sent me. Mostly, so I could say to myself, I was still trying to do a PhD and it made for a good excuse to read academically again. I wrote a similar email to the one I sent to Nova so do such and such my name is Aaron I have a master's in etc, do you think it would be suitable and I got a sort of informal interview on Skype had a chat with the man leading the projects, again I just disclosed my Asperger's which he didn't feel the problem at all, he suggested I make a formal application, which I did that lead to a more formal interview which consisted of some technical details of the project, why is this a significant subject, why do you want to do it, how would you use this source, which, in a way it wasn't a different way to even over in some ways the style of questions was similar it was just a substance that have changed that makes any sense, and then, after some waiting, I was accepted, and now I am six months into my PhD and one of the reasons my supervisor gave for picking me was I had actually worked elsewhere, I had not just stayed in the university system and gone bachelor's master's PhD.

So I feel i've been talking for a long time, but the big things I want you to take away from everything I just said, are:

1. Be persistent which i'm pretty sure Michael’s also mentioned do not give up looking for work.It may be, you have to take a less direct route to the career, you wanted it might also be you find a job that you enjoy which is completely different to what you first imagined yourself doing. I have friends who is inexplicably really into medieval theology and real estate and it is entirely possible for you to stumble across a job you never thought you love, it's also possible for unexpected opportunities to come up while you stay busy with other things, so, in the meantime, like keep your eyes and ears open.

2. Try to be sociable and open to talking about what you want to do with your friends your teachers and the people who have the kind of jobs, you want. Because those are the ones who will have advice on finding work take advantage of social events and things arranged by the University like if you're here you're kind of doing the right thing. Join societies attend talks, some people call this networking I hate the word networking I think it's basically corporate speak for something we should all do instinctively which is be friendly, explore new ideas talk about your interests and show an interest in other people that's networking apparently I like to think of it as making friends and being Nice.

3. Take care of your mental health develop strategies for managing anxiety, if you have it, keep you moved up try whatever work you're not from I take medication and have a lot of counselling, still sometimes call my mother and say everything's a bit short today, but some people find God or do yoga or take art classes or go for walks do whatever works for you.

4. Don't be scared the world work can seem very intimidating like this big black pit but actually the pitch is about four feet deep. Companies do not expect new employees at entry level positions to be masters of their craft and they will train you nobody starts out an expert at their job everybody learns everybody grows everyone at that company had a first day at work, everyone had a first week. When I started at Nova I told myself, if I can do one week i'll be happy and then, when i've done a week I thought, if I can do, one month, then, even if I crack up and quit i'll be satisfied for having done that month and I ended up spending half a year there and partying on really good terms, but my point is you don't need to be afraid of work and if you find change intimidating it can be helpful to break it up into little steps.

I went from living at home and studying to living by myself and studying to living by myself and training for Chapel to living by myself and teaching English in the foreign country. Approaching things through baby steps is absolutely fine and sensible approach, on the other hand, you may well surprise yourself with what you can accomplish in the words of the other stuff there's a lot more to you than there is to you are indistinct might be sort of yearn for the safe and comfortable but there's a lot of satisfaction to be gained, if you push yourself that little bit further, and the very last point don't compare yourself to other people. People go through their life at their own pace, some people rush on in one direction, others kind of meander peacefully and another someone to climb the career ladder and others want to experience working in many different places, there is no right way to go about finding work and people have different priorities, I would say, find something about life that you enjoy and then aim for a job that lets you do as much of that as possible. So that's basically a summary of my career, up to now, and my asked us for finding work, and I hope it's been at least moderately helpful, thank you very much for listening.